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EL SALVADOR: Military Commander Revolts

The rebellion of an important field commander has caused divisions in the armed forces and has increased tensions between Defense Minister Garcia and Assembly President D'Aubuisson. (S)

Lt. Col. Sigifredo Ochoa, who commands more than 1,000 troops in Cabanas Department in northern El Salvador, has declared himself in rebellion against Garcia. Ochoa reportedly wants to stop orders for his reassignment overseas--in effect, his political exile--by forcing Garcia out of office.

[] several other field commanders--including leaders of US-trained battalions--have expressed vocal support for Ochoa, but no clashes between loyalist and rebel troops have been reported. (S) ~~NF NC OC~~

Garcia and the high command are maintaining close contact with key military units and are said to be confident that they can meet the challenge posed by Ochoa and others aligned with ultrarightist leader D'Aubuisson. Garcia has accused D'Aubuisson of complicity in the rebellion and has warned him against further meddling in military affairs. (S) ~~NF NC OC~~

Comment: Ochoa is widely respected for his tactical ability and decisive leadership, and his revolt is the most serious challenge to Garcia's power in three years. Discontent with the Defense Minister's handling of the counterinsurgency has grown in recent months, particularly among junior officers, and he faces increased military and political pressure to step down. Nonetheless, his position of relative strength may enable him to weather this challenge peacefully. (S)

Ochoa's surrender would enhance Garcia's position with D'Aubuisson and the ultraright. The Defense Minister probably will be forced, however, to accept a compromise solution. (S) ~~CIA, DIA, NSA~~

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